CHAPTER L

THE NIVELLE OFFENSIVE

WITH or without Russia the Western Allies were committed to fight out the issue until an honourable peace was attainable. The internecine troubles of the great Eastern Power did not therefore derange or delay the preparations made for a renewal of the struggle on the Western Front. The Ghantilly scheme was pressed on according to plan, as if nothing had happened to disturb the calculations upon which it was based. It was assumed by all the commanders in the field, as well as by the Staff advisers of the Governments, that the Russian Army would play the part allotted to it in the campaign, perhaps with renewed energy. Castelnau alone expressed any doubts on the point, and he did not embody his misgivings in his official report.

With the departure of Joffre, many expected a reversal of the profligate strategy of throwing masses of men against an impenetrable labyrinth of trenches, bristling with machine-guns and defended by the most powerful artillery and best trained infantry, on the offchance that some of the assailants might find a way through and out.

Joffre's successor, General Nivelle, was known to be a good soldier with a record of prudent, skilful and successful generalship in the grim struggle around Verdun. Of his endowments as a strategist on a